

The Distance Between Two Points



I think there is a great deal of misconception as to what an editor *really* does in a journal. Structural edits, that is, copyediting – which includes correction of spelling and grammar, syntax and punctuation, checking abbreviations, citations and references, style and consistency – forms but part of the overall process

of “editing.” Some people seem to think that this is only what an editor does (and this is already a lot of work, by itself). What happens between 2 points – manuscript submission and article publication – that, is the work of the editor, and it is by no means, easy.

When a manuscript is submitted it goes through a process that will lead either to its acceptance or rejection. This involves an initial screening as to whether the manuscript is acceptable within the scope of the journal, as to compliance with the editorial requirements. For all articles, the requirements include the author's/authors' certification that those listed have qualified as authors based on authorship criteria set forth by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), have declared that their work is original, unpublished, and not under consideration for publication elsewhere, have complied with the copyright transfer agreement of the journal, and have provided disclosure as to potential conflicts of interest. For original articles, the journal requires submission of a copy of the approval of the relevant ethics and technical review board; for case reports, informed consent of the subject to be featured in the article should be submitted. Those articles that have passed screening shall undergo peer review (i.e., sent to appropriate peer reviewers representing technical expertise or authority on the subject) and can follow either of the following fates: acceptance with no revisions required, acceptance with minor revisions, acceptance with major revisions, or rejection (i.e., declined for publication). Within this process, there may be a back-and-forth communication between the author and the reviewer through the editor, during which clarifications or requests for further information can be sought, authors can submit corrections based on the reviewers' recommendations and provide

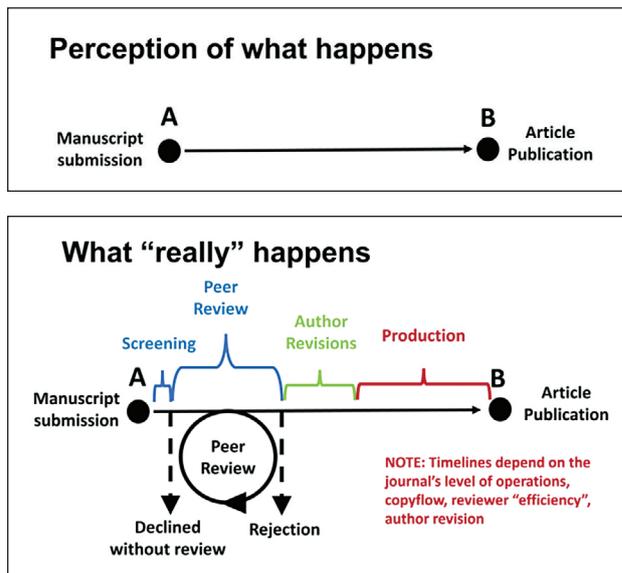


Figure 1. What happens to each article?

a point-by-point response to each comment, and final decision by the Editor-in-Chief. It does not stop there. Accepted articles go into production, in which copyediting and layout occur, with the necessary author approvals obtained on the final article that will be made public.

The Editor-in-Chief assumes responsibility for the articles published in the journal and this accountability continues so long as an article remains published. Policies are in place should there be a need for retraction or correction, but the main published article stays albeit marked as “retracted” or indicating that it has been “corrected.”

The distance between manuscript submission and article publication is one that is not as straightforward as it may seem to other people. To be fair, many people contribute to each and every article and the Editor is in charge of overseeing this process. It requires passion, patience, and perseverance, objectivity, and resolve. Moreover, it requires time: that irreversible, irreplaceable resource that we all have very little of, and which I hope we are not wasting through this continued effort for a better practice.

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